River Farms to Urban Towers

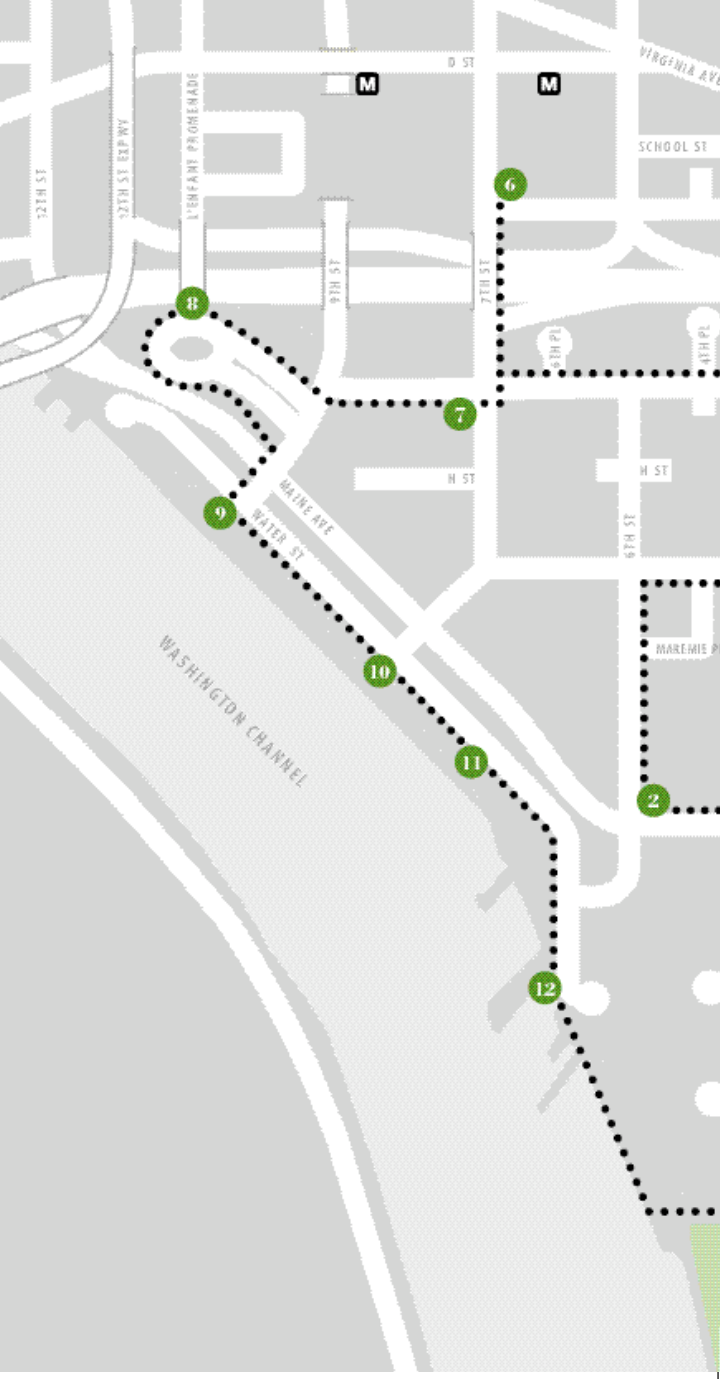
SOUTHWEST HERITAGE TRAIL

From 1791 until the 1950s, Southwest Washington was the city's largest working-class, waterfront neighborhood. Then it was almost entirely leveled by urban renewal. Follow this trail to the places that recall Southwest's first settlement, its gritty maturity, and its rebirth as a "new town in the city."

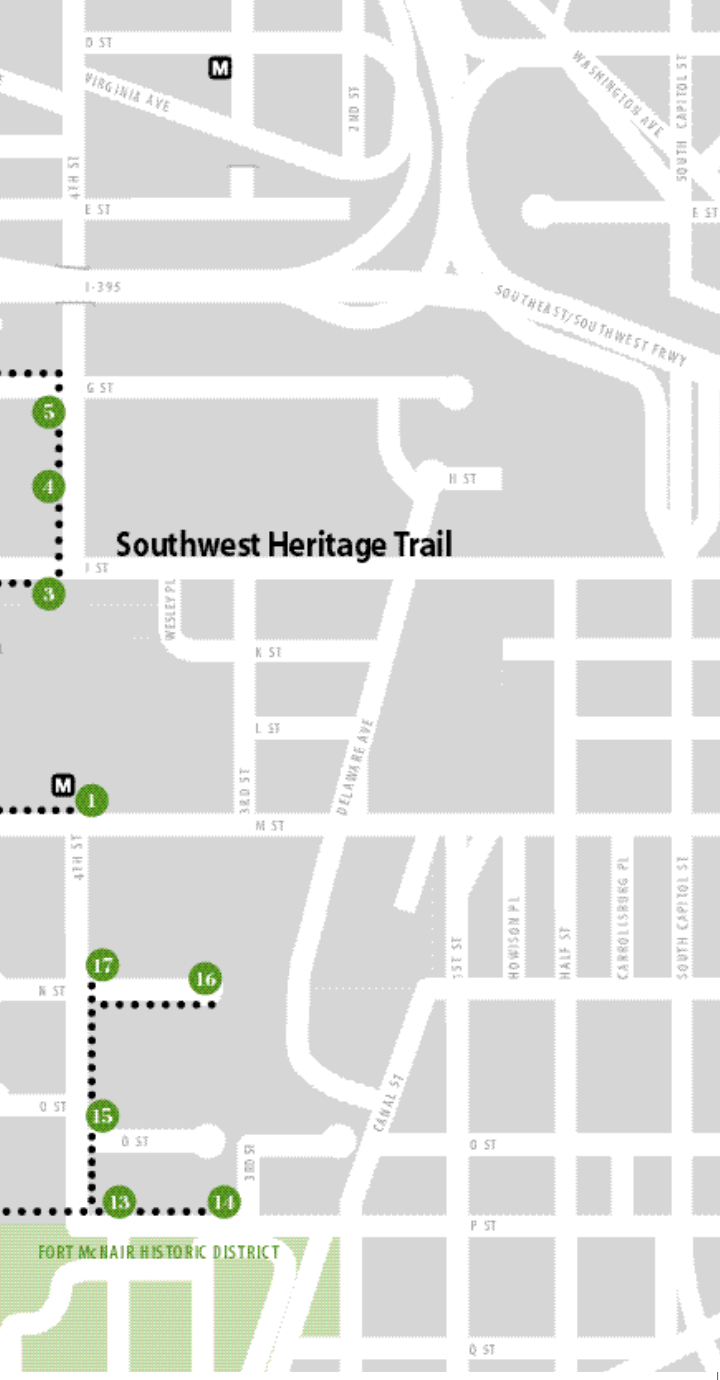
Welcome.

Visitors to Washington, DC flock to the National Mall, where grand monuments symbolize the nation's highest ideals. This self-guided walking tour is one of a series that invites you to discover what is beyond the monuments: Washington's historic neighborhoods.

Until the 1950s, the neighborhood known as Southwest was Washington's largest working-class, waterfront neighborhood. Then nearly all of Southwest was razed to create an entirely new city in the nation's first experiment in urban renewal. Experience both the old and the new Southwest in the company of the first colonial settlers; migrants and immigrants; fishmongers, domestic workers, laborers, government clerks and congressmen: all passengers on the journey from river farms to urban towers.



The **Southwest Heritage Trail** *River Farms to Urban Towers* is composed of 17 illustrated historical markers. You can begin your journey at any point along the route. The walk should take about 90 minutes. Each marker is capped with an **H**.



Sign 1 is found atop the Waterfront/SEU station on Metro's Green line. Sign 6 is at the corner of Seventh and E streets near the L'Enfant Plaza station on the Blue, Orange, Yellow, and Green lines.

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Design by side view/Hannah Smotrich

As you walk this trail, please keep safety in mind, just as you would while visiting any unfamiliar place.

River Farms to Urban Towers
Southwest Heritage Trail

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Introduction

THIS TRAIL TAKES YOU THROUGH one of Washington, DC's oldest — and newest — neighborhoods. For 150 years Southwest Washington was a working waterfront community. Then urban renewal changed the landscape forever. Today Southwest is a virtual library of Modernist architecture of the 1960s with a few historic structures, some of which go all the way back to the section's beginnings.

In 1791 nearly all of today's Southwest was owned by Notley Young, a Maryland planter whose slaves cultivated his numerous farms. That year the federal government included this area in its plan for the new seat of government. The area was ripe for development: a level, low-lying triangle of land defined by the Potomac River, Anacostia River, and Tiber Creek. The waterways were key to its growth in the days before railroads and modern transportation.

Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library

Oystermen tie up at the Southwest fish wharf, 1915.

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Notley and Eleanor Young

In the 1790s a group of investors led by James Greenleaf began to build sturdy brick houses for congressmen and government workers. Their money ran out before they could finish, but a few of their projects can still be seen today on Fourth and N streets. After the 1790s builders constructed individual cottages or simple row houses of wood or brick.

The city's first military post (now Fort McNair) was established here in 1794 on strategic Greenleaf's Point, where the Anacostia and Potomac rivers meet. In 1798 the first ferries to Alexandria City across the Potomac encouraged settlement. Soon, however, the affluent moved on to the more fashionable Northwest and Capitol Hill, and Southwest became home mostly to dock workers, laborers, tradesmen, and domestic workers. The waterfront became industrial, with warehouses, coal yards, armories, ice houses, and shipyards. Eventually wholesale markets and Washington's auto inspection station and morgue were found here. In the 1920s the wharves operated 24 hours a day, and Washingtonians in search of a late-night meal — or more disreputable pastimes — could find them in Southwest.

Southwest was called "the island" because the Tiber and James creeks separated it from the rest of the city. Beginning in 1815 the City Canal ran from the Potomac River near today's Lincoln Memorial to the foot of Capitol Hill, then took a sharp right turn to end at the Anacostia River,

The Isaac Levy family of Levy's Busy Corner, young Gene Cherrico with his grandmother Filomina, and Lewis Jefferson, Southwest's millionaire.

Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington

further isolating Southwest. The canal was paved over in the 1870s, but by then the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad tracks along Virginia and Maryland avenues imposed a new barrier, as would the Southeast-Southwest Freeway of the 1960s.

Even before the Civil War (1861–1865), migrants from rural Virginia and West Virginia, European immigrants — especially Italians and German and then Eastern European Jews — and both enslaved and free African Americans predominated in Southwest. The waterfront community was a natural for the Underground Railroad, and the infamous *Pearl* escape attempt of 1848 began here. During and after the war, thousands of newly freed African Americans settled in Southwest, attracted to its affordable housing and unskilled employment.

By 1900 Southwest was fully built but deteriorating. Talk of rehabilitation surfaced in the 1930s. But by the 1940s architects and planners had new ideas. Rather than renovating individual structures, influential planner Harland Bartholomew and architects Louis Justement and Chloethiel Woodard Smith called for razing entire blocks.

Collection of Gene Cherico

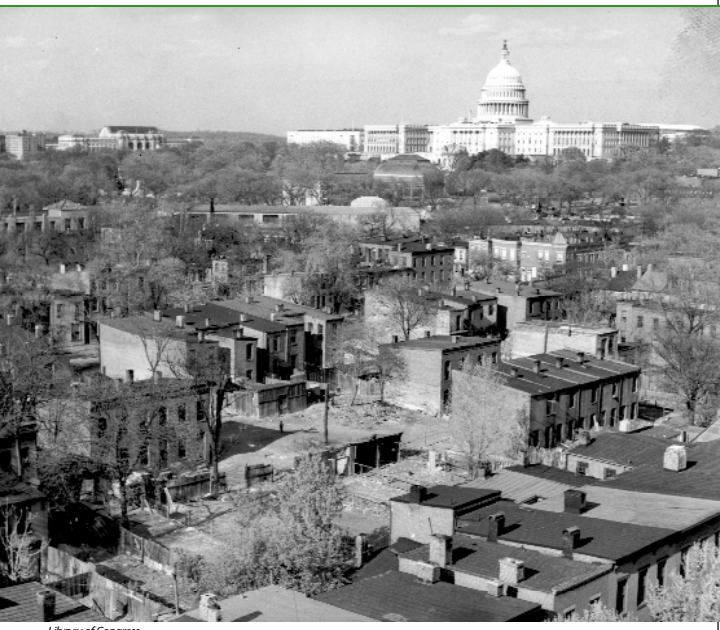
Mary Therl Lewis Jefferson Collection

They wanted to close streets and put up sleek new buildings, creating commercial, cultural, and employment centers close to residences. They considered Southwest an ideal laboratory. So did the D.C. Redevelopment Land Agency, empowered to tear down Southwest in order to fix it.

In the 1950s New York developers Webb and Knapp put these ideas into a formal plan for a new Southwest, the nation's first full-scale urban renewal project. Architects Harry Weese and I.M. Pei envisioned a Tenth Street Mall linking the National Mall to a rebuilt waterfront and a residential area serving 4,000 families of varying incomes. Offices, hotels, restaurants and shops would line the new mall. A major cultural and entertainment center would complete the picture.

While most of the residential buildings materialized, Webb and Knapp never completed the Tenth Street Mall, and the cultural center was built instead in Foggy Bottom (today's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts). Nevertheless, the brand-new residential areas, so convenient to

Published images of rundown Southwest "in the shadow of the Capitol," *top,* helped instigate urban renewal projects including Capitol Park, *bottom*.



Library of Congress

Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library

the federal core, attracted middle-class government workers as well as members of congress and their staffers. "We thought we were urban pioneers," recalled journalist Neal Peirce. "We were moving back to the center city and we were quite idealistic.... We wanted to make Southwest a model...." The new Southwest housed Hubert H. Humphrey and Sandra Day O'Connor, among others. Some low-income former residents were able to return, but most were displaced, casting a shadow on the urban renewal ideal.

In 2004, 50 years later, residents of Southwest enjoy new community traditions as Arena Stage, Southeastern University, churches and schools anchor daily life. At the same time plans to rehabilitate the 1960s era shopping mall/office complex and the waterfront promenade are well underway.

1

Fish and softshell crabs were sold fresh off the boat at the Maine Avenue wharf in 1945.

Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library

Change on the Waterfront

FOURTH AND M STREETS SW

AS WASHINGTON DEVELOPED, Southwest became its main working, waterfront community. Its wharves received travelers, food and building materials, slaves and migrants, and weapons for the new City of Washington. Ships were built and repaired here. The port was particularly busy during the Civil War, when Washington served as the Union Army's headquarters and supply center.

By 1900 this bustling neighborhood was densely built, with a working-class community of some 35,000. They were modest people of all backgrounds: European immigrants, urban African Americans, and migrants from nearby rural areas. The waterfront was a major marketplace, where Chesapeake Bay watermen tied up and sold fresh seafood and farmers delivered fresh produce. Waterfront warehouses held these commodities for distribution throughout the city.

With its small town atmosphere, and modest brick and wooden buildings and shops, Southwest was homey and self-sufficient.

As real estate developers opened other areas of the city, Southwest quietly aged. Its modest rowhouses, elegant older homes, and cramped alley dwellings became run down and overcrowded. By the 1930s, reformers called Southwest obsolete. News stories declared it was located "shamefully … in the shadow of the Capitol." *The Washington Post* led a campaign to tear down Southwest and start over. The press published photographs of "urban blight," ironically situated next to the nearby U.S. Capitol. Consequently nearly all of Old Southwest — 560 acres of buildings and trees — was razed between 1954 and 1960. In its place a much-admired "new town in the city" was built. But the forced dispersal of 23,500 people continues to raise important questions about the benefits of urban renewal.

2

In this 1962 view, Marina View Towers and Arena Stage occupy this corner where brick rowhouses once stood.

Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library

New Town in the City

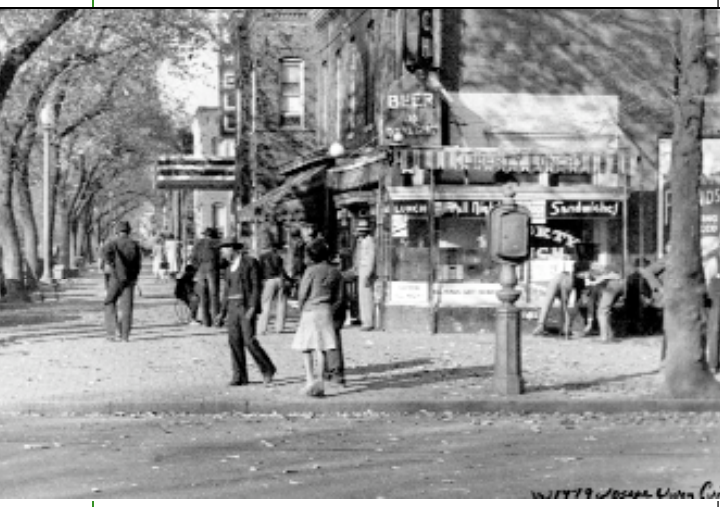
SIXTH AND M STREETS SW

THE BUILDINGS AT THIS INTERSECTION all resulted from the nation's first urban renewal project. On the northwest corner of Sixth and M streets is Arena Stage, a leader in the resident company theater movement. Arena Stage was founded as an innovative theater-in-the-round in an old downtown movie theater in 1950. It moved to its Harry Weese-designed building in 1961. At the corner of Sixth and I streets is the Modernist high-rise residential complex of Waterside Towers designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith. Stretching south from M to N Street is Tiber Island, a prize-winning development by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon. These designs make Southwest a showcase of mid-20th-century architecture and planning. St. Augustine Episcopal Church, completed in 1965, was one of seven churches built after urban renewal demolished 28 of 34 houses of worship.

In the 1930s congressional and city officials nationwide were struggling with the problem of aged, deteriorating cities. Could they be fixed and beautified, or should they be torn down and built anew? Would better buildings improve the lives of residents if their communities were lost? Could governments re-make cities alone, or did they need help from private developers? And would the displaced ever be able to come home again?

Southwest offered Congress a test lab. Most Southwesters were low-income people who valued their neighborhood but lacked political clout. Nearly half of the housing lacked plumbing. Disease rates were high. Criminal activity included gambling and prostitution. So beginning in 1954, despite thousands of protests, the Redevelopment Land Agency moved 23,500 people and cleared the land so that private developers could build a "new town in the city." Neither urban or suburban, innovative clusters of townhouses and high-rise apartments with green spaces and parking made up the new town.

3



In 1939 this portion of Fourth St. was the commercial heart of old Southwest.

Photograph by Joseph Owen Curtis

The Heyday of Four-and-A-Half Street

FOURTH AND I STREETS SW

THIS QUIET STREET was once Washington's answer to New York's Lower East Side. Fourth Street, known until 1934 as 4½ Street, and nearby Seventh Street were Southwest's shopping centers.

Around 1900, 4½ Street was the dividing line between a mostly African American community living to the east and mostly Irish, Italian, and Jewish communities to the west. Yet blacks and whites came together over life's necessities in the small shops along 4½ Street. Grocers, butchers, cobblers, and merchants supplied flour and sugar, fresh meat, clothing, and dry goods. German Jewish immigrants moved in during the Civil War, living above their small businesses alongside Irish shopkeepers. A larger wave of Eastern European Jews began arriving after 1880.

This street was the center of Jewish life in Southwest, but it was never exclusive. The Jewell Theater, showing movies to African American audiences, once sat on this block across from today's Amidon Elementary School. Children of all backgrounds played together in the alleys and schoolyards, and roamed to the National Mall to visit the Smithsonian museums or play ball on the open fields.

Southwest's Jewish community produced a civic leader for the entire city. Attorney Harry S. Wender worked to make DC streets safer and to create playgrounds. In 1934 he brought black and white citizens together to persuade the city to tear up the worn-out cobblestones of 4½ Street, modernize it, and re-name it Fourth Street to symbolize its rebirth. The entire neighborhood celebrated the new street with the first integrated parade in the city's history.

4

Rabbi Arthur Rosen, second from left, provided kosher chickens to Paul Clarke's Jewish customers, around 1938.

Collection of Larry Rosen

A Mixing Bowl

FOURTH BETWEEN I AND G STREETS SW

AL JOLSON, STAR OF THE FIRST "TALKING" MOVIE, *The Jazz Singer,* grew up as Asa Yoelson at 713 4½ Street (once across the street from this sign). The Yoelsons arrived from Lithuania in 1880. Asa's father Rabbi Moses Yoelson served as cantor and shochet (ritual slaughterer) for Talmud Torah Congregation nearby at Fourth and E. Here young Asa soaked up the African American speech and music that contributed to his later stardom as an entertainer. After *The Jazz Singer* took the world by storm, Jolson moved his family uptown to today's Adams Morgan. Meanwhile the family of Rabbi Arthur Rosen moved into 713.

On the southwest corner of Third and I streets, John T. Rhines founded a successful funeral home that served the African American community from 1906 until his death in 1946. A civic leader, Rhines presided over the Southwest Civic Association. Though childless, Rhines led the nearby Anthony Bowen School PTA and was popularly known as "Genial John" as well as the "Mayor of Southwest." He worked to bring recreation programs to area black children and received the *Evening Star*'s Civic Award in 1943.

On the west side of Fourth Street was Schneider's Hardware, owned in 1949 by Goldie Schneider. She was one of many Southwesters who fought the planned demolition when Congress passed urban renewal legislation in 1945. Southwesters argued that few of the displaced black residents would be able to afford to rent the new units. Businessmen saw their livelihoods vanishing. So Schneider and fellow store owner Max R. Morris sued all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1954 they lost when the Court unanimously ruled in *Berman v. Parker* that the Redevelopment Land Agency could take (and destroy) private businesses in order to improve an overall neighborhood. Demolition was allowed to proceed.

5

Chloethiel Woodard Smith, designer of Capitol Park and much of Southwest, rests her blueprints on a Capitol Park garden barbecue pit, 1959.

Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library

Renewal and Loss

FOURTH AND G STREETS SW

THE HIGH-RISE POTOMAC PLACE on Fourth Street was the first new structure to open in the redeveloped Southwest. Originally called Capitol Park, the complex of high-rise and townhouse residences was designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith of Satterlee and Smith. Smith was one of the visionary architects and planners who campaigned to start over again with a blank canvas in Southwest. Critics hailed Capitol Park as a "beautiful building, inside and out," noting its inspiring views of the Capitol and the Washington Monument. Smith won awards for her creative design (efficiencies had a "folding wall" to create a separate bedroom) and materials. Soon she was the leading choice for designing other new Southwest buildings.

Capitol Park replaced Dixon Court, a set of alleys inside the block bordered by Third, Fourth, H, and I streets. For years the press and social reformers presented Dixon Court as a blighted environment that incubated crime and disease. Its 43 tiny houses, lacking plumbing and green spaces, were chronically overcrowded and in need of repair. Yet when the court was the first to be demolished in 1954, a close-knit urban community whose neighbors had worked together and watched out for one another was also destroyed.

The relocation of 23,500 Southwesters was an enormous job. Many who were financially able left Southwest when urban renewal plans became public. Workers with the Redevelopment Land Agency helped others find affordable housing. In 1960 the Washington Housing Association reported that 46 percent of those displaced had moved to Southeast, 27 percent to Northeast, and 15 percent to Northwest. Only 12 percent returned to Southwest, with its higher prices.

6

Windows depicting the Virgin Mary, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and St. Joseph oversee the ordination of Dominican priests at St. Dominic Church in 1938. *St. Dominic Church*

St. Dominic's: Community Anchor

SEVENTH AND E STREETS SW

ST. DOMINIC CHURCH, established 1852, anchors the city's only Dominican parish. It is the city's sixth-oldest Catholic church. St. Dominic's survived two disasters — a fire in 1885 and, thanks to friends in Congress, the threat of urban renewal in the 1950s — to prevail as a spiritual and community center. In the 1800s it ministered to farmers, slaves, free blacks, and Irish, German, and Italian immigrants as well as native-born government workers and members of Congress. Since urban renewal, it has served its newest neighbors. This Gothic style structure was dedicated in 1875.

Nearly everyone from the humble to the famous has sought spiritual comfort at St. Dominic's, from newly freed slaves during the Civil War to former Speaker of the House Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill. President Lyndon B. Johnson often came for late-night private prayers during escalations of the Vietnam War. Actress Helen Hayes, born and raised in Southwest, sang in the church choir. And Washington Senators star pitcher Walter Johnson headlined the church's annual parade in 1937.

Neighbors of all faiths have appreciated St. Dominic's. "The whole neighborhood would go to [its] carnival with its bright lights," recalled Larry Rosen who grew up on 4½ Street. The priests and nuns of St. Dominic's school taught hundreds of area children from 1852 until 1957, when the rectory, convent, and school were all demolished for the Southeast-Southwest Freeway. The 600 block of Seventh Street was designated for a new school, but because the new Southwest had fewer children, the parish asked to use the site instead for low-income housing. After years of litigation, developers completed Capital Square townhouses, which sold at market rates in 2001.

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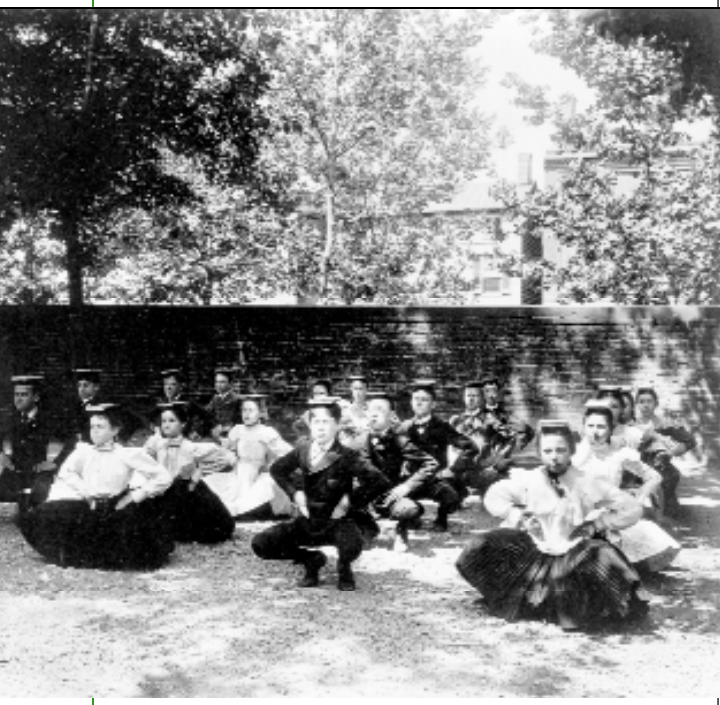


Students at one of Southwest's elementary schools for white children perform posture exercises, around 1899.

Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Library of Congress

Equality in Public Education

SEVENTH AND G STREETS SW

JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, 801 Seventh Street, was built in 1940 after area residents persuaded the city to abandon its original dilapidated building on Virginia Avenue. They hoped the new structure, which included a branch library, would be the beginning of section-wide improvements.

In September 1954, for the first time, African American students took their seats next to whites in Washington's public schools. The Supreme Court had just ruled that "separate-but-equal" facilities were unconstitutional, so black students from nearby Randall Junior High all came to Jefferson. Integration was surprisingly peaceful. Former Jefferson student Carl Cole recently recalled that integration "had no concerns for me. I had played with white children all of my early life here."

Washington's system of separate schools required many buildings, but they didn't always meet community needs. In 1954 Southwest had five overcrowded "colored" elementary schools, four under-enrolled white elementaries, and a junior high for each group. On the eve of integration, the school-age population had already declined considerably because Southwesters were leaving in response to urban renewal. Planners expected that new Southwesters would be older and/or childless, given the higher costs for most new housing. So seven elementary schools were demolished, leaving just three: William Syphax, Anthony Bowen, and a new Margaret Amidon. By 2004 there were two, with Syphax being adapted for residential use.

Because Seventh Street ends at the waterfront, in the 1800s businesses began locating here and into far Northwest Washington. Omnibuses (horse-drawn wagons) carried passengers along Seventh until 1862, when Congress chartered a horse-drawn street railway on Seventh from Boundary Street, NW (now Florida Avenue) to the river.

8

Benjamin Banneker, astronomer and mathematician.
Maryland Historical Society

Banneker Circle: Vista to the Past

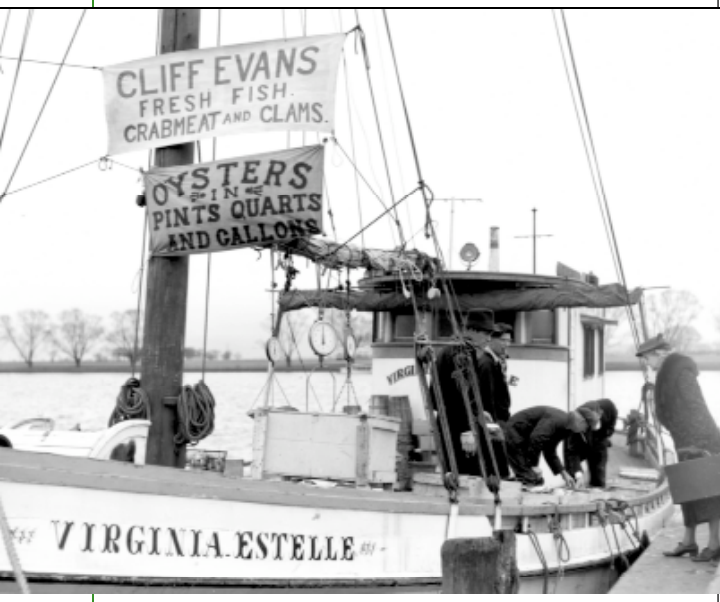
BENJAMIN BANNEKER CIRCLE
END OF TENTH STREET PROMENADE SW

THIS HIGH GROUND IS A MONUMENT to Benjamin Banneker, the free African American who charted the stars for the first survey of Washington, DC. Banneker was 60 years old when he assisted surveyor Andrew Ellicott. A tobacco planter from Baltimore County, Maryland, the brilliant Banneker had taught himself mathematics and astronomy. Each night he observed the stars' movements. Ellicott then used Banneker's calculations to determine the District's boundaries. In addition Banneker published a series of almanacs predicting the movements of the sun, moon, and stars to guide farmers in the best timing for planting and harvesting. He also was a champion of black rights, writing to Thomas Jefferson on the enormous injustice of slavery in a nation founded on Jefferson's own declarations of freedom.

This vista once belonged to Notley Young, a Maryland planter. He owned nearly all of today's Southwest when President George Washington chose this area for the new nation's capital in 1791. Young's brick mansion stood close to today's Banneker Circle. Young owned numerous farms, and in 1790 he reported to Census takers that he owned 265 slaves. Before the American Revolution, Maryland's Catholics were prohibited from worshipping in public churches, so Young gathered his Catholic neighbors for Mass in his home. In 1857 Young's grandson, Father Nicholas Young Jr., helped establish St. Dominic Church.

Leading into Banneker Circle, the L'Enfant Promenade now covers the site of Young's house. The promenade was designed by I.M. Pei and others for New York developer William Zeckendorf. They envisioned a dramatic expanse lined with office and cultural buildings to link the National Mall and Southwest's waterfront. Today's Forrestal Building blocks what was intended to be a view from Banneker Circle to the Smithsonian castle.

9



Like Cliff Evans of the Virginia Estelle, Chesapeake Bay watermen once sold their catch from boats tied to the wharf. *Library of Congress*

The Working Waterfront

NINTH AND WATER STREETS SW

WELL INTO THE 1900S, the Southwest waterfront was a bustling, noisy, smelly place. Wharves, piers, and warehouses lined the river, and local industry thrived. Schooners brought ice from New England for delivery to family iceboxes. Lumber came and went by boat. Maryland coal, shipped via the C&O Canal, piled up in nearby coal yards. A large municipal warehouse was the distribution point for fresh produce. Laborers, shopkeepers, domestic servants, and government clerks lived alongside bootleggers and gamblers. The city morgue was nearby, as were small ship-building facilities. Waterfront taverns, restaurants, and hotels served workers, travelers, and neighbors. Some families lived on houseboats. And colorful watermen tied up at the docks daily to sell the harvest of "the great protein factory"—the Chesapeake Bay.

Gene Cherrico, who grew up at 918 Sixth Street in the 1950s, once delivered the *Daily News* along the waterfront. "The pay wasn't much," he said, "but the tips were great. At the Flagship [restaurant], the kitchen help gave me a bag of their famous rum buns. I would sit behind the restaurant eating buns and shaved ice while watching hucksters selling crabs and fish from dockside boats."

Today's large restaurants along the waterfront are the heirs to yesterday's humble oyster shacks. The Fish Wharf between 11th and 12th streets has succeeded the large municipal fish wharf once found along Maine Avenue. The daily catch now arrives by refrigerated truck. During urban renewal, planners tried to change the waterfront from a workplace for the broad-shouldered to a center of entertainment and recreation. In 2004 planners are hoping to further this idea, creating a walkable waterfront more like the old days and adding more residential buildings.

10

Emily and Mary Edmonson, wearing plaid shawls, appeared at a New York abolitionist convention with Frederick Douglass two years after their failed attempt to escape slavery in Washington.

Madison County [New York] Historical Society

Escape From Slavery

SEVENTH AND WATER STREETS SW

BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, Washington was a slave-holding city. But many of its citizens — especially free blacks and white abolitionists — assisted freedom seekers at locations known as stops on the Underground Railroad.

The largest attempted slave escape began on the evening of April 15, 1848. In the gathering dark, 77 men and women slipped aboard the schooner *Pearl,* waiting near this sign. Captain Daniel Drayton had agreed to sail them south on the Potomac and then north to freedom via the Chesapeake Bay. But bad weather forced the *Pearl* to anchor just short of the Chesapeake Bay. Meanwhile someone — many later said a jilted suitor of escapee Emily Edmonson — tipped off the slave owners.

The *Pearl* was apprehended and its passengers and crew were brought back to the Seventh Street wharf. They were marched in chains to jail near Judiciary Square as mobs jeered. Drayton later wrote, "it seemed as if the time for the lynching had come." Enraged whites rioted for three days, attacking offices of the *National Era,* an abolitionist newspaper they associated with the escape attempt. Unharmed, the enslaved were all sold South. Edmonson's father raised the money to buy the freedom of Emily and her sister Mary, and the sisters went on to campaign for abolition. Emily eventually returned to the DC area, where her descendants still live.

Also nearby were the home and church of Anthony Bowen, a free black minister and Patent Office clerk. Oral tradition says he met escaping slaves here and helped them on their way north. In 1853 Bowen founded the nation's first YMCA for African Americans in his home on E Street between Ninth and Tenth.

11

Passengers sprint off the River Queen for Marshall Hall Amusement Park, around 1920.
Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library

All Aboard

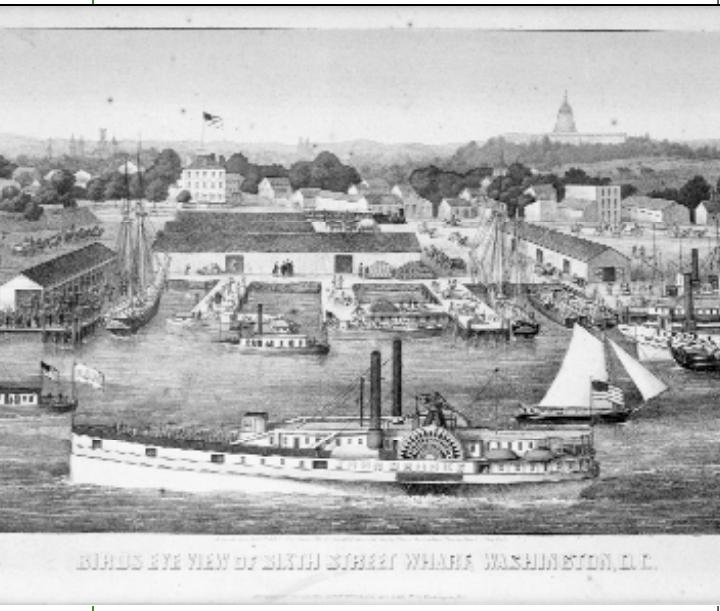
SOUTH WATER STREET SW
WEST SIDE ENTRANCE TO PROMENADE

BEFORE BRIDGES SPANNED THE POTOMAC, ferry boats took people and goods across the river. You could sail to Alexandria from Greenleaf's Point (now Fort McNair), or between the points where today's 14th Street Bridge touches ground. Sailing vessels, and later steamships, came here from Norfolk, Virginia (and points south) and Baltimore, Maryland (and points north). Washingtonians wanted international trade, but unfortunately, Baltimore and Norfolk had deeper harbors for larger vessels. Baltimore and Norfolk became thriving ports as the 1800s unfolded. Washington fell behind, focusing more on regional trade.

Regular steamboat service began on the Potomac in 1815 between Washington and Aquia Creek, where the Potomac bends near Fredericksburg, Virginia. There passengers disembarked and rode overland to Richmond and points south. Railroads were built throughout the area in the 1830s, but political wrangling blocked the construction of a rail line to the south from Washington. Voyagers continued to travel by steamboat to Aquia Creek and then to the new southern railroads. Finally, around 1860, a railroad was built connecting Washington to Richmond. Yet passengers continued to book the overnight steamers. The last one sailed in 1957, nearly a century after it was no longer essential for southern travel.

Washingtonians have long enjoyed cruises to amusement parks along the Potomac. Lewis Jefferson, Sr. (1866–1946), Washington's first African American millionaire, ran the Independent Steam Boat and Barge Company around 1900. Jefferson's vessels sailed ten miles south to Washington Park, his amusement park for African Americans. The businessman, banker, contractor, ship builder, and real estate developer invested heavily in Southwest. An admired community leader, he lived in a gracious brick mansion at 1901 First Street.

12



Civil War activity on the Sixth Street Wharf, 1863. The Law House, then the Mount Vernon Hotel, flies the American flag. *Library of Congress*

The Enduring Law House

SOUTH END OF WATER STREET SW
AT TURNAROUND

THE TIBER ISLAND COOPERATIVE HOMES, built in 1966, include an important historic building as their community center: the Thomas Law House. The Federal style house was designed by William Lovering in 1794 for businessman Thomas Law and his bride Eliza Parke Custis, granddaughter of Martha Washington. Early on it was known as "Honeymoon House." Originally the house stood at the foot of Sixth Street overlooking the Potomac. Since then, time and engineers have changed the shoreline, so the house now sits farther from the water. It is one of very few to survive the 1950s urban renewal.

After the Laws' time, the area around the house grew commercial. During the Civil War the house became the Mt. Vernon Hotel, where guests saw Union troops embarking for the South from the busy Sixth Street wharf. They also witnessed the arrival of stunning numbers of wounded soldiers. "Quite often," recorded poet Walt Whitman, "they arrive[d] at the rate of 1,000 a day." Here President Lincoln greeted Union reinforcements arriving to defend the city's Fort Stevens from Confederate attack in 1864. At the war's end, Washington's own regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops marched triumphantly up Seventh Street to the cheers of well-wishers.

Around 1913 the Law House became the Washington Sanitarium's Mission Hospital, ministering to the area's working class and poor, black and white. In 1923 Dr. Henry G. Hadley purchased the house to operate as a clinic. According to Southwester Phyllis Martin, he "was a family doctor to all of the people of Southwest," who frequently neglected to take payment for his services. In 1952 Hadley built Hadley Memorial Hospital in far Southwest, named to honor his mother. The Hadley Clinic closed in 1961 during urban renewal.

13

Two Civil War guns guard the waterfront where the Anacostia meets the Potomac at Washington Arsenal, now Fort McNair, 1862.

Library of Congress

Military Education at Fort McNair

FOURTH AND P STREETS SW

FORT LESLEY J. MCNAIR honors the memory of the commander of Army Ground Forces during World War II who died in battle. The fort is the U.S. Army's third oldest installation, after West Point and Carlisle Barracks.

Fort McNair dates back to 1791, when Washington City planner Pierre L'Enfant saw that the point where the Potomac and Anacostia rivers meet was ideal for a military installation, and he so noted it on his map. At first the installation was known as the Arsenal at Greenleaf's Point, where the Army stored and distributed weapons. During the War of 1812, according to a contemporary newspaper report, a dozen British Redcoats were killed when they accidentally set off gun powder hidden down a dry well by a retreating American commander. In 1826 a U.S. penitentiary was added to the installation, and 34 years later four of the eight prisoners charged with conspiracy in President Lincoln's assassination were hanged in its courtyard.

After the Civil War, the fort's importance in the defense of Washington declined. In 1881 the arsenal was closed, and the fort was used to store Army uniforms and supplies. The small post hospital became a research center, and from 1893 until his death in 1902, yellow fever pioneer researcher Dr. Walter Reed studied infectious diseases here. Then in 1904 the Army War College was founded, opening the era of higher education for senior military personnel.

In 2004 the eight divisions of the National Defense University include the National War College, which opened in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War (1898). Fort McNair also is home to the Inter-American Defense College, established at the height of the Cold War to safeguard the Western Hemisphere.

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Alvin Ford poses beside his home at 1206 Carrollsburg Place, one of the Southwest houses built by Sternberg and Kober's philanthropic investors.

Photograph by Joseph Owen Curtis

Public Housing and the Syphax School

THIRD AND P STREETS SW

IN THE 1890S AMERICAN CITIES had a common problem. The working poor lived in deteriorating houses and even wooden shacks. In Washington this housing often lined the city's hidden alleys. People needed healthier and safer places to live. Should government build them? Private enterprise?

In 1897 two Washington public health officials, George Sternberg and George Kober, decided that private investors should build solid, affordable housing, even though there would be little profit. Between 1897 and 1939, they persuaded charitable Washington investors to clear slums and build 1,034 units (houses and apartments) around the city. The new housing was very popular.

By 1939, however, the investors could no longer afford this enterprise. Fortunately five years earlier the federal government had established the Alley Dwelling Authority. With government funding, the work of creating affordable housing continued.

The low-rise buildings of St. James Mutual Homes along Third and P streets were built by Sternberg and Kober's investors in the 1940s as Sternberg Courts and Kober Apartments. The James Creek Dwellings (First and O streets) and Syphax Gardens (P Street at Half Street) were built by the Alley Dwelling Authority and its successors. Soul music superstar Marvin Gaye (1939–1984) spent part of his childhood at Syphax Gardens.

The Syphax School, at 1360 Half Street, honors William Syphax, a descendant of Martha Washington's grandson George Washington Parke Custis and Airy Carter, an enslaved woman. Syphax served as the first president of the board of the Colored Public Schools of Washington (1868–1871) and was openly opposed to school segregation. Syphax School operated from 1902 until 1994. In 2004 Manna, Inc., was preserving the school's exterior as part of an affordable housing development.

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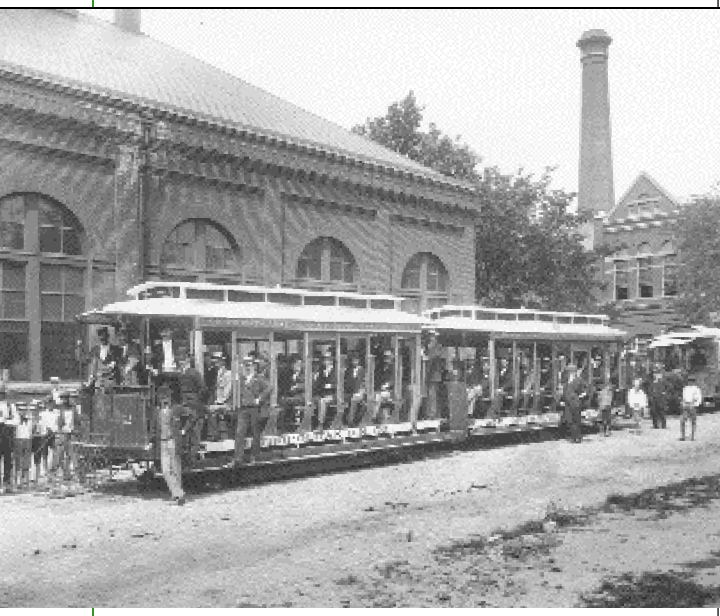

Metropolitan Railroad electric streetcar at the car barn, 1895.
Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library

Linking the "Island" to the City

FOURTH AND O STREETS SW

A MASSIVE, ROMANESQUE STYLE Metropolitan Street Railway car barn once commanded the northeast corner of Fourth and P streets. Trolley repair shops sat across Fourth Street. These buildings dated from the 1880s, and were part of Washington's first street railway (later trolley) system. Streetcars were a lifeline for this neighborhood, long known as "the island" because it was cut off from the rest of Washington by creeks, a canal, the Mall, and eventually railroads and freeways. "We had our own community here," recalled Southwester Clarence "Chick" Jackson, "but we could also go anywhere off the island on the streetcar. It was our… connection to the city."

In the early 1800s, Washingtonians walked where they needed to go, rode in carriages and wagons, or traveled by horseback. Later they traveled in horse-drawn wagons known as public omnibuses. By the Civil War, however, the city was booming, overwhelmed with soldiers, civilians, and supplies that needed efficient transportation. In 1862 Congress chartered the first street railway — cars pulled by horses on steel tracks laid atop Washington's unpaved and often muddy streets. Given the strategic importance of Southwest's wharves, one of the first three rail lines ran along here, looping from Boundary Street (now Florida Avenue, NW) to Seventh Street, then back via Fourth Street.

The electric trolleys of the late 1880s came next, and the system grew to serve the entire city. In 1962 modern buses replaced the trolleys. That year most car barns became unnecessary. O. Roy Chalk, who owned D.C. Transit (which became publicly owned Metrobus in 1973), tore down his car barns here to build the apartment houses that now occupy these sites: Riverside Condominium and Channel Square.

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Courtyard scene, River Park promotional brochure, 1962

Collection of River Park MutualHomes

Recreation and River Park

N STREET SW, CUL DE SAC AT RIVER PARK

WASHINGTON'S SCHOOLS AND PLAYGROUNDS were legally segregated from 1862 until 1954. But that didn't stop kids of all backgrounds from playing together. "We didn't understand racial disharmony," said Southwester Gene Cherrico of his childhood on Sixth Street in the 1950s. "Everybody was equal. Everybody was poor." Yet playground monitors were instructed to keep the races apart. On the block bounded by Delaware Avenue and Canal Street is today's King-Greenleaf Playground, formerly the white-only Hoover Playground that sat amid a largely black neighborhood. Randall Playground, some five blocks north off Delaware Avenue and H Street, was operated for black children. The children often ignored the rules to play together.

For adults, though, social time was more segregated. When public housing first opened here, residents met in social and self-improvement groups such as the Syphax Homemakers Club. Long past the 1953 court-ordered end to segregation in public accommodations, the adults of Southwest found entertainment on their own sides of the Fourth Street dividing line. African Americans enjoyed Bruce Wahl's restaurant and summertime beer garden at Fourth and C streets. Whites gathered at waterfront watering holes such as Hall's Restaurant, at Seventh and K. Founded in 1864, Hall's had been a favorite of General U.S. Grant.

The townhouses and highrises of River Park were designed by architect Charles M. Goodman, who worked with Reynolds Metals to feature aluminum in its unique concept for urban residential architecture. When River Park opened as a cooperative in 1963, its tenants worked to ensure an integrated population. From the beginning, the residents together have made decisions governing the use and care of the River Park facilities.

In 1963 artist Garnet Jex photographed the Duncanson-Cranch House as construction was underway for Harbour Square.

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Blending Old and New

FOURTH AND N STREETS SW

WHEN URBAN RENEWAL threatened to destroy three of Washington's oldest structures, their tenants organized to stop the bulldozers. Consequently when architect Chloethiel Woodard Smith designed the mid-20th century Harbour Square at Fourth and N streets, she included Wheat Row (1795), Duncanson-Cranch House (circa 1794), and Edward Simon Lewis House (1817).

Wheat Row, the elegant set of four Federal style houses on Fourth Street, was created by James Greenleaf, Washington's first real estate speculator. Greenleaf and his partners hoped to get rich building housing for the new city. Instead Greenleaf went bankrupt, but left behind a few well-made houses. This group was named for John Wheat, an early owner who worked as a Senate messenger. At 456 N Street is Lewis House, built for a Navy clerk. A few houses down at 468–470 is Duncanson-Cranch House. William Mayne Duncanson was a wealthy trader who lost his fortune investing with Greenleaf. William Cranch, Greenleaf's brother-in-law, had a distinguished career as chief justice of the DC Circuit Court. World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle once lived in Lewis House.

In 1901 Charles Weller opened Neighborhood House in Lewis House as Washington's first social settlement. There he provided education and recreation for poor white children and adults, with the city's first organized playground. The branch library — the city's first — welcomed blacks as well as whites in keeping with library policies. In 1904 artist and socialite Alice Pike Barney bought Duncanson-Cranch House for Neighborhood House, and the institution became Barney Neighborhood House. It continued to grow, occupying three of Wheat Row's four houses, before moving to 16th Street, NW, in 1960. Weller also helped found the "Colored Social Center" in 1903 at 118 M Street, forerunner of today's Southwest Community House.

Sources

THE PROCESS OF CREATING a Neighborhood Heritage Trail begins with the community, extends through story-sharing and oral history gathering, and ends in formal scholarly research. For more information on this neighborhood, please consult the resources in the library of City Museum/The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and the Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library. In addition, please see the following selected works:

Sterling Brown, "The Negro in Washington," in Federal Writers' Project, *Washington: City and Capital* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937).

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Cultural Tourism DC

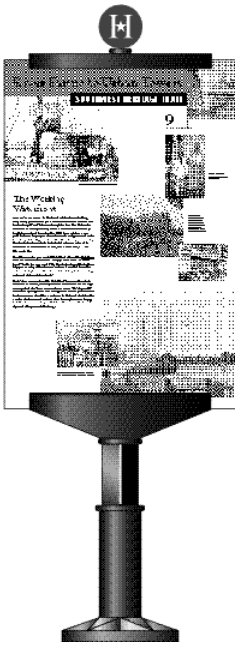
Discover the heart of Washington

Cultural Tourism DC (CT/DC) is a nonprofit coalition of more than 130 heritage, cultural, and neighborhood organizations that work to strengthen the image and the economy of the nation's capital by engaging visitors and residents of the metropolitan area in the diverse history and culture of the entire city of Washington. For more information about CT/DC's Neighborhood Heritage Trails program, guided tours, and other cultural events, please visit **www.CulturalTourismDC.org** or call 202.661.7581.

Southwest Neighborhood Assembly is a private, nonprofit citizens organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for all residents of the Southwest; to open to every Southwest resident the wide cultural horizon of urban living; to help create rich and equal social, educational, and economic opportunities for every boy and girl of the Southwest; to assist in providing the opportunity for gainful employment for every adult resident; to promote development of the economic and aesthetic potential of the Southwest. These objectives shall be pursued without regard to the social, economic and racial barriers that have divided cities in the past. For more information, please see **www.swdc.org**.

On this self-guided walking tour of Southwest, historic markers lead you to:

- Some of Washington's oldest houses.
- The docks where the U.S. Colored Troops returned in triumph at the end of the Civil War.
- The lovely St. Dominic Church, which fended off urban renewal.
- A spectacular vista that memorializes Benjamin Banneker.
- Fort McNair, Washington's first military installation.
- A cooperative residential complex trimmed in aluminum.
- The site of Washington's answer to the Lower East Side.



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